



BACKGROUND GUIDE

Cabinet of Mikhail Gorbachev



Letter from The Executive Board

Greetings Delegates,

It is with great pleasure that we present the study guide for the simulation of the ‘Cabinet of Mikhail Gorbachev’ at SNAMUN’21. This study guide should be a great starting point for research. It will help to become familiar with the topics and attain a better understanding of the problems that will be discussed throughout the conference.

We encourage you to conduct extensive research and formulate the viewpoints in accordance to the agenda. We expect you to bring about viable solutions and factually analyse the agenda through both research and effective lobbying.

Wish you good luck for the conference!

Regards,

Executive Board

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE & ITS OBJECTIVE

The committee is a simulation of the Russian Cabinet headed by Mikhail Gorbachev. The objective of the committee is to simulate how a Russian cabinet would function, when you as delegates would hold key portfolios and act as decision and policy makers and would be tackling the problems which confronted the actual cabinet back in the day.

Essentially, it is an opportunity to see what you would have done differently had you been at that position and holding the portfolio that you would be holding in the committee. It would be test of your intellect as the agenda of the committee is something that was very pertinent to the time in which this committee is set in.

Since it being a historical committee, the delegates are advised to adhere to the freeze date as any event beyond the freeze date would not be accepted.

A historical committee is a committee that is based and simulated in the past. When the committee is in session, we have to assume that for all practical purposes we are at the freeze date and actually in Moscow holding the portfolios assigned and tackling the problem at hand.

The freeze date would be February 8, 1990.



ABOUT THE AGENDA

Agenda: Growing Concerns to The Diminishing Power Of The Soviet Union With Special Emphasis On The Geo-Political State Of USSR

Due to a plethora of reasons, some of which are discussed below, since the 1980's the Soviet Union's power and international political influence started diminishing. This had many far reaching consequences at both the international and the domestic level which had implications that led to questions about the survivability of the Soviet Union itself.

The decrease in Soviet Power also led to the Soviet Union withdrawing from Afghanistan because of the huge strain it placed on the resources of the Soviet Union and which in turn led to the decrease in International prestige of the Soviets.

The decrease in prestige led to many regional separatist movements gaining steam and renewed the call for independence amongst the satellite states, further threatening the integrity of the Soviet Union.

Therefore, charting a future course of action would be of paramount importance for this cabinet as the Soviet Union itself is at stake.

USSR

The USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) was founded in 1922; five years after the Russian Revolution overthrew the monarchy of Czar Nicholas II. It was the largest communist country in history by landmass, and its Cold War with the United States (1947–1991) filled most of the 20th century with tension that extended throughout the world. During much of this time (1927–1953), Joseph Stalin was the totalitarian leader. His regime (Stalinism) is known as one of the most brutal in world history.

Between 1945 and 1949 Stalin created a Russian empire (Soviet empire) in Eastern Europe. This empire included Poland, Hungary, Albania, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and East Germany. Each had a Communist government. In the West they were called the 'Satellite States' because they clung closely to the Soviet Union like satellites around a planet.

Diplomatically the creation of the satellite states fuelled the emergence of the Cold War. This heightened a feeling in the west that Stalin intended to implement the directive written in the teachings of Karl Marx that it is the duty of a communist state to spread communism across the world by causing about a global uprising to liberate the farmers and workers of the world.

From the perspective of the Soviet Union the satellite states gave them a strategic buffer zone between themselves and a hostile west. They gained a large territory with which they could trade. It enhanced their power and, in theory, strengthened communism.

Soviet Union further Strengthened it's position by signing a treaty in 1955 with seven of its European satellites establishing the 'Warsaw Pact', a mutual defence organization that in reality put the Soviets in command of the armed forces of the member states.

Before the treaty was signed, United States and other members of NATO made West Germany a part of NATO. The Soviets obviously saw this as a direct threat and responded with the Warsaw Pact. The treaty committed the members to come to each other's immediate assistance if attacked; mirroring the NATO stance of an attack against one is an attack against all.

The continued presence of Soviet troops in the member countries exacerbated discontent in Poland and Hungary, where there was trouble in 1956 (Hungarian Revolution). In Poland, Nikita Khrushchev (leader of the USSR from 1953-1964) backed away from a confrontation, but not in Hungary, where the government's determination to withdraw from the Pact was met with force and in Budapest people fought Soviet tanks with their bare hands. The treaty was invoked in 1968 when the Soviet Union moved Warsaw Pact troops from Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria into Czechoslovakia to regain control of the regime in Prague.

By the end of 1979, the Soviet Union invades Afghanistan, under the pretext of upholding the Soviet-Afghan Friendship Treaty of 1978. It was the first Soviet military expedition beyond the Eastern bloc since World War II and marked the end of a period of improving relations (known as détente) in the Cold War.

By the 1980s, a new type of leader emerged in Mikhail Gorbachev. In an attempt to boost his country's sagging economy, Gorbachev introduced a pair of initiatives known as glasnost and perestroika.

Glasnost (Openness) called for political openness and ended the banning of books, allowed citizens to criticize the government, and allowed for other parties than the Communist Party to participate in elections. Perestroika (Restructuring) was an economic plan that combined communism and capitalism.

The Cold War

The United States and the Soviet Union had worked together to defeat the Axis powers in the WWII, their partnership quickly turned to decades of confrontation. There were disagreements in rebuilding Europe. This fierce conflict is called the "Cold War" since the two superpowers never directly engaged in combat ("hot war"). Instead, they increased their military capabilities, tried to expand their global influence, and undermined the other's way of life in the eyes of the world. While the United States believed in a capitalist system of free markets and multiple political parties, the Soviet Union was founded on a communist system controlled by a centralized state and a single political party.

Three key features defined the Cold War:

- 1) The threat of nuclear war,
- 2) Competition over the loyalty of newly independent nations, and
- 3) The military and economic support of each other's enemies around the world.

From 1945 to 1953, the USSR expanded its influence by creating the Eastern Bloc. The United States likewise began to meddle in the affairs of foreign nations where it feared communist regimes would gain control. This became known as a policy of containment. This policy was mainly created due to the "Domino effect theory", where it was feared that when a country becomes communist, it leads to the other countries in the region to also follow suit, like a domino.

In the 1950s, competition had spread to the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America, with each side trying to establish control. By the 1960s, the Cold War reached Africa. Many former colonies achieved independence from European empires (decolonization). These new nations sided with the Americans or Soviets to receive economic and military aid.

In the 1960s, competition had spread to Vietnam. Vietnam was divided into a communist north and pro-West south. To contain the communist north, the United States invaded in the 1960s. The Soviet Union sent money and weapons to the communist forces. By 1975, with the help of the Soviets and China, a small, poor nation with an army of rice farmers defeated the most technologically superior superpower in the world.

The USSR then intervened in Afghanistan in the 1980s. It wanted to ensure the victory of a communist-leaning group and sent troops to assist them. The United States created an military opposition against the Soviet troops in Afghanistan known as the Mujahideen, with money and weapons. Ultimately, the US-backed forces emerged victorious.

Fragility of the USSR in The 1980s

Political Factor:

When Mikhail Gorbachev entered into the office in 1985, his primary domestic goals were to jump-start the stagnant Soviet economy and to streamline the cumbersome government bureaucracy. He instituted the policies of glasnost (“openness”) and perestroika (“restructuring”). The former was intended to foster dialogue, while the latter introduced quasi free market policies to government-run industries.

The state lost control of both the media and the public sphere, and democratic reform movements gained steam throughout the Soviet bloc. Perestroika exhibited the worst of the capitalist and communist systems: price controls were lifted in some markets, but existing bureaucratic structures were left in place, meaning that Communist officials were able to push back against those policies that did not benefit them personally. By the end of 1989 Hungary had dismantled its border fence with Austria, Solidarity had swept into power in Poland, the Baltic States were taking concrete steps toward independence, and the Berlin Wall had been toppled. The Iron Curtain had fallen.

Economic Factor:

Economic stagnation had hobbled the country for years, and the perestroika reforms only served to fuel the problem. Wage hikes were supported by printing money, increasing the inflation. Throughout the 1980s, the Soviet Union ranked as one of the world’s top producers of energy resources such as oil and natural gas, and exports of those commodities played a vital role in shoring up the world’s largest command economy. When oil plunged from \$120 a barrel in 1980 to \$24 a barrel in March 1986, this vital lifeline to external capital dried up.

Military Factor:

Military spending was a large part of the overall economy of USSR. Even when the Soviet economy lagged, the military remained well-funded. In addition, the military took priority when it came to research and development talent. Technological innovators and would-be entrepreneurs who could have helped support Gorbachev's partial transition to a market economy were instead engaged into defence industries.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Delegates here are a few questions which you, as cabinet members will be expected to ponder over before coming to the committee. These questions will help you frame your approach towards the committee.

1. Is the dissolution of the Soviet Union imminent and inevitable? Or can it be averted?
2. If the dissolution of the Soviet Union is avoidable, then how or what step can this cabinet take to avoid it?
3. Possible reaction of NATO to any steps taken by the Soviet Union. Political or Military.
4. Geopolitical implications for Russia upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union.
5. What can this committee do to improve the Economic situation of the Soviet Union?
6. What can this committee do to improve the international Political influence or to regain the political influence lost over the years?
7. How to win the Cold War or at the least, change the situation in Russia's advantage?